Canada must explore Line 5 alternatives for energy

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Body

In invoking the 1977 Transit Pipelines Treaty for Line 5, Canada prioritized the financial interests of a fossil fuel giant over what's best for Canadians. This pipeline poses a massive threat to the Great Lakes and the recent accident in California is a stark reminder that pipelines can and do spill. Alternatives to Line 5 exist, but the government has failed to properly consider them. When will Canada stop supporting the dangerous false solutions proposed by Enbridge and look critically at all of their options?

The Great Lakes hold 84% of North America's freshwater and their protection must be a priority, particularly in the face of the climate emergency. Line 5 is located in the worst possible place for an oil spill in the Great Lakes according to experts at the University of Michigan. In Canada, a major spill could harm beloved places such as Manitoulin Island, the Bruce Peninsula, and Sauble Beach.

The recent underwater pipeline rupture off the coast of California spilled over 470,000 litres of oil, leaving a massive oil slick and a shoreline littered with dead birds and fish. It's suspected that this was caused by an anchor strike, which is exactly the kind of thing that could happen to Line 5. In fact, there have been three anchor incidents in the Straits of Mackinac over the last 4 years alone despite it being a "no anchor" zone. If Line 5 were to rupture into the Straits of Mackinac, it could engulf up to 1100 kilometres of shoreline and spill even more oil than in California. But a Line 5 rupture is really not a question of "if," it's a question of "when."

Line 5 crosses nearly 400 water bodies and has already had larger spills than the one that just happened in California. One of these spills happened in Crystal Falls in 1999 when over 830,000 litres of oil and natural gas liquids poured out of the pipeline. Responders accidentally ignited a vapour cloud resulting in a 36-hour fire that forced 500 people to evacuate. This is not an isolated case - there have been other large spills along Line 5's route and the tragic impacts linger for years.

Enbridge's proposed solution to the ongoing threat of Line 5? A tunnel to encase the section running through the environmentally sensitive Straits of Mackinac. Not only is this a false solution, it's a dangerous one. According to scientists the proposed tunnel project and pipeline could contribute an additional 27 million metric tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere annually, and generate $41 billion in climate damages between 2027 and 2070. Supporting the long term continued operation of this old, leaky, dangerous pipeline goes completely against the rhetoric of the current government that likes to talk about meaningful climate action and protecting the Great Lakes.

There's also the fact that Canada's gambit may fail. Article IV of the Treaty states that pipelines can be regulated by the appropriate government when it comes to matters of safety and environmental protection.

It's time for Canada to do its research. Alternatives to Line 5 exist. We must put the health of the planet and the people before the financial interests of the fossil fuel industry.

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